



TEXAS INDIGENT DEFENSE COMMISSION

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TIDC And PPRI Awarded Major Federal Grant To Advance Evidence-Based Indigent Defense

AUSTIN, Texas – The [Texas Indigent Defense Commission](#) (TIDC) and their colleagues at the [Public Policy Research Institute at Texas A&M University](#) (PPRI) today announced a two-year \$400,000 grant award from the US Department of Justice (DOJ). The project will build the “Smart Defense Portal,” an internet interface promoting high-quality court-appointed defense systems statewide.

The new Smart Defense Data Portal will integrate local data into a statewide quality indicator system. It will also offer model measures, educational content, and resources to guide counties monitoring the effectiveness of local indigent defense systems. The Commission will work closely with advisors in seven Texas counties to develop the system including Bell, Collin, El Paso, Lubbock, Tarrant, and Travis Counties, as well as the Harris County Public Defender Office. The Public Policy Research Institute will take the lead in implementing development.

Commission Chair Sharon Keller observes, “Our state’s indigent defense data systems have been key to many advancements in Texas, including a 150% increase in state investment, routine indigent defense plan and expense reporting to the state, online attorney caseload reports, and an 80% increase in appointed counsel to qualified defendants.” James Bethke, TIDC executive director, agrees, “This project will create an internet-based framework of quality indicators to which all jurisdictions can aspire, and many can attain in the foreseeable future. It will take us to the next level.”

The new DOJ-funded website is a major step forward in a decade-long effort by TIDC to promote the use of data to strengthen local indigent defense systems. The Commission, established in 2002, is recognized nationally for their leadership applying data to indigent defense planning. University of Texas Law Professor Jennifer Laurin, who studies the role of such systems in policymaking, recently counted Texas among “the key movers and shakers promoting the development of evidence-based policy in the field; to describe their work is to describe the vanguard of the trend.”

Today nearly twenty Texas jurisdictions representing forty percent of the state’s population have benefited from TIDC funding to increase indigent defense data capabilities. “TIDC has always understood the power of data to improve practice,” said PPRI lead researcher Dottie Carmichael. “We are proud to have helped implement that vision over the years.”